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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9789
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2897
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1195
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1166
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2103
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3912
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 4809
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2359
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2946
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 2878
RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH 1035
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001542

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, DRL, DRL/AWH, IRF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/13/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINS KIRF ID

SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN SCHOOL UNDER PRESSURE

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On July 25, small clashes involving local residents and Christian seminary students broke out in East Jakarta. No one was seriously injured. Police have evacuated the seminary and placed students and staff in camps in the Jakarta area. On August 12, the students demonstrated peacefully to bring attention to their circumstances. Noting the religious freedom implications of the case, Mission is urging the GOI to resolve the situation as soon as possible.
END SUMMARY.

TENSIONS AT A SEMINARY

¶2. (SBU) There has been tension linked with religious freedom in Jakarta. On July 25, residents of Kampung Pulo, a mainly Muslim area in East Jakarta, clashed with students at the Arastamar Theological College (SETIA) campus. (Note: The seminary is run by Evangelical Christians who are not linked to any denomination.) Residents--possibly spurred on by Muslim militants from outside the local community--accused SETIA students of robbing local residences. A large crowd attacked several buildings on the SETIA campus lightly injuring 17 students and causing some damage to buildings. Police evacuated all students and staff from SETIA and separated students by gender into two camps in the Jakarta area.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

¶3. (C) Poloff visited the camps and spoke to Yosep Lifire, a teacher with SETIA, on August 12 to express USG concern. During the visit, poloff noted that the students seemed to be in good shape, with members of their religious community, the local government and charities providing them food and other supplies (though the logistics system appears tenuous). In the two camps, there are over a thousand students total. Lifire witnessed the July 25 tensions. Although he was unable to specifically identify the assailants or any associations they may have had, he alleged that at least some were members of hard-line Muslim organizations. Lifire claimed that the Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI), a hard-line

group responsible for previous incidents against moderate Muslims and others, had helped spur on residents of the area.

(Note: We have also heard that at least one aspect of the tensions involves some sort of land dispute.)

¶4. (C) Lifire criticized what he characterized as "police inaction" during the July 25 incident, saying that although several hundred police responded, only students were detained. Though Lifire witnessed individuals from the mob brandishing weapons, he said police made no effort to arrest them. Police ultimately released the students they had arrested.

¶5. (C) As of August 12, the East Jakarta local government has refused to allow the SETIA students to return to their campus, asserting that to do so would raise security concerns. Lifire said he met with a representative of the surrounding Kampung Pulo village. The representative said residents do not want the students to return. Lifire hopes the government will enforce the seminary's legal and property rights while holding perpetrators of violence responsible for their actions.

PRESSING THE GOI

¶6. (C) The case is a bit tangled and--as noted--may involve a land dispute. That said, Mission has underscored the religious freedom implications of the case to the GOI and is urging the government to work to resolve the situation as soon as possible. On August 12, 250 students from SETIA held a rally in central Jakarta to draw attention to the situation. Reports in local print media quoted SETIA officials to the effect that the students may attempt to

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enter Mission compound in order to claim political asylum. We have underscored to SETIA officials that they should approach UNHCR with such questions, not the U.S. Embassy.

HUME